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ABSTRACT

This study sought to uncover elements of campus culture at a large, predominantly white metropolitan university in the Southwest which hinder or support Chicano student persistence. Because the concept modeling research design required complete immersion in the lives of students, the number of participants was limited to two. The two students selected were both first-generation students from working-class families where Spanish was spoken at home, and who lived in predominantly minority communities. These criteria were chosen because Chicano students with such characteristics show high levels of premature departure from college. Data was collected over a period of two years and involved "shadowing," or observing participants' daily activities for a 6- to 8-hour period approximately once a month, monthly audiotaped interviews, and student journals. Data analysis identified three elements of campus culture, broadly categorized as: the social world; the physical world; and the epistemological world. It was found that within each of these elements of campus culture, the dominant white culture communicated the message that a Chicano presence was unimportant, not valued, and did not belong. The findings also described limited, but important, sources of support for Chicano students, including Chicano student organizations; symbols representing Chicano culture; Chicano studies, faculty, and literature; and students' families. (Contains 35 references.) (CH)

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Campus Culture and the Experiences of Chicano Students in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, November 17, 1999, San Antonio, Texas.

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Campus Culture and the Experiences of Chicano Students in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities

Abstract

The primary goal of this study was to uncover the elements of campus culture in a predominantly White university which hindered or supported Chicano student persistence. The first set of findings described the elements of campus culture which hindered the persistence of Chicano students. These elements were identified as three, asymmetrical systems of representations. The three systems of representations were labeled, (a) the social world, (b) the physical world, and (c) the epistemological world. It was found that within each of these three worlds dominant White cultural representations communicated the message that a Chicano presence in a predominantly White university is something that is not important, or valued, or does not belong.

The second set of findings described the limited, but important, sources of support for Chicano students. These sources of support included Chicano student organizations, physical symbols representing the Chicano culture, courses in Chicana/o studies, Chicano faculty, Chicano literature, and most importantly, the families of the research participants.

Campus Culture and the Experiences of Chicano Students in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities

Over the past two decades, there has been an explosion of research investigating the multiple dimensions of college or university culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988, 1990; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The underlying assumption of this research is that campus culture is an important variable in explaining how decisions and actions are made. Many of these studies also assume a "corporate culture" perspective (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Tichy, 1982) which suggests that internal cultures supportive of organizational goals and strategies will lead to increased levels of effectiveness. Finally, this research assumes that institutional culture is socially constructed. In other words, campus culture is understood as "less social fact and more on-going social definition." (Tierney, 1987, p. 65.) The overall research agenda, then, is one of understanding how to mold, shape, and change organizational culture so that it may be consistent with institutional goals and strategies (Smircich, 1983).

One of the more recent challenges for predominantly White colleges and universities is molding a campus culture which supports the goal of improving the retention rates of an increasingly diverse student body. Although the numbers of racial and ethnic minority students attending predominantly White colleges and universities continue to increase, the culture or climate which exists in many of these campuses remains a negative factor in their efforts to persist (Skinner & Richardson, 1988). For example, a number of studies have found that African American students attending predominantly White colleges and universities are more likely than their White peers to view these campuses as alienating, isolating, hostile, and less supportive to their needs (Allen, 1981; Allen, 1985; Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984; and Sedlacek, 1987). In addition, Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) found that the social climate for ethnic minority students attending predominantly White colleges and universities engenders an additional burden of stress in their academic adjustment to college. And, Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that minority

student perceptions of prejudice-discrimination on campus negatively affects their adjustment to college and exerts an indirect effect on their decisions to persist.

Latino students as an aggregate, also, interpret the culture or climate of predominantly White colleges and universities as alienating, isolating, hostile, and unsupportive (Attinasi, 1989; Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Hurtado, 1992; 1993; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Olivas, 1986). For example, Hurtado, Carter and Spuler's (1996) study of Latino student transition to college found confirmation for Smedley et al.'s (1993) findings that climate-related minority status stressors have a "depressing effect on Latino students' feelings of attachment to the institution." (p. 151) Hurtado (1993) found that even high-achieving Latino students attending predominantly White universities viewed the climate of these institutions as troublesome. In particular, Hurtado (1993) discovered that more than a quarter of these high achieving Latino students felt like they did not fit in. Hurtado argued that her findings suggest that there are "elements of institutional culture, perhaps associated with its historical legacy of exclusion, that continue to resist a Latino presence on campus." (p.35.)

In sum, the research is clear that the culture or climate of predominantly White colleges and universities remains problematic for Latino and other ethnic minority students. What is unclear in the literature, however, is an understanding of the elements of campus culture which engender a problematic social environment for ethnic minority students. It is this deficiency that provided motivation for the study.

The goal for the study was to uncover the elements of campus culture which hinder or support ethnic minority student persistence. Campus culture, for this study, refers to deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior, as well as the shared values, assumptions, and beliefs that members have about their institution (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). As a strategy to uncover such elements of campus culture, I chose to examine the experiences of a small number of students from one particular ethnic group, Chicanos, in a predominantly White university for a period of two years. Working under a qualitative or interpretivist tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), I believed that an in-depth study of a small number of Chicano students would be more fruitful in revealing the elements of campus culture, than a study of a large sample of students

representing a variety of ethnic groups. The following two global research questions (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990) provided focus for the study: (a) How do Chicano students experience their university environment? In particular, what meanings do they construct of their university experiences during their first two years? (b) What elements of the campus culture hinder or support their persistence?

Methods

To understand the various meanings Chicano students constructed of their university experience, as well as the elements of the campus culture which hindered or supported their persistence, I chose an interpretive research design and utilized a concept modeling analytical approach. Concept modeling, as defined by Padilla (1991), is a method of describing and understanding social situations. The concept modeling approach begins by gathering relevant data about the situation. This may be done by directly observing the situation and recording field notes, by acquiring and reading documents relevant to the situation, and by interviewing actors who are part of the situation. Once relevant data are collected, the next step toward explaining the situation is to identify the various assertions contained in the field data and organize them into a coherent whole.

Padilla (1991) noted that the difficult analytical task in the process of identifying assertions is organizing them into a coherent explanation of the situation. Consequently, in the concept modeling approach, assertions in the field data are used to define specific concepts. Once concepts are identified and defined, relationships between concepts are examined, and an explanation of the situation is rendered as a result of identifying the relationships between concepts. This method is discussed in greater detail in the data analysis section.

Research Site and Participants

The site for this study was a large, predominantly White university located near a metropolitan city in the southwest. Because the research design required complete immersion in the lives of the students, the number of participants was, of necessity, limited to two. I used a purposeful, criterion-based sampling technique (Patton, 1990) to identify participants for the

study. Steve and Luis were selected to participate in this study because they met the following criteria: (a) they were both first-generation Chicano college students; (b) they were both from working-class families; (c) Spanish was spoken in both of their homes; and (d) prior to their university enrollment, both students lived in predominantly minority communities. I chose these criteria because Chicano students possessing such characteristics continue to show high levels of premature departure from colleges and universities (Carter & Wilson, 1997). Before elaborating on the data collection methods employed in this study, I present a more detailed description of the research participants. (All student names are pseudonyms.)

Steve. Steve was a nineteen year old freshman when the study began. In social settings, he came across as shy and pensive. During our interviews, however, Steve radiated a sense of passion and commitment about being the first in his family to attend college. Steve carried a sense of responsibility with his first-generation college status. He proclaimed, "I'm here to make my parents proud. They want me to succeed in ways they couldn't. They want me to be able to get the kind of job that they had no chance of getting." Neither of Steve's parents were able to receive any education beyond the sixth grade.

Steve was born in East Los Angeles, California. After spending the first eight years of his life in East Los Angeles, Steve's family moved to Hermosillo, Mexico. The move was in response to the Los Angeles smog exasperating Steve's youngest brother's respiratory problems. Steve doesn't remember much of his experience in Mexico, and considers the U.S. to be his "home turf." After three years in Mexico, Steve and his family moved back to the U.S. and settled in Phoenix, Arizona where they live today.

Steve excelled in high school, but did not have any intentions of attending a university until his mother encouraged him to participate in a college recruitment program for minority students that she had heard about on the local Mexican radio station. He commented, "If it wasn't for my mom listening to the radio that morning, I don't know if I'd be here." It was at this recruitment program that Steve would meet his closest collegiate friend, Luis.

Luis. Luis, also, was nineteen and a freshman when the study began. However, unlike Steve, Luis was gregarious in social situations with a penchant for flirting with the opposite sex. Luis also differed from Steve in that he lacked educational encouragement from his parents. His father was a full-time mariachi musician who was hoping that Luis would follow in his footsteps. Luis often commented that his motivation to pursue higher education was internal.

Luis was born in Michoacan, Mexico, and lived there until the age of eight. Luis becomes nostalgic when reflecting on his years in Mexico. In 1986, Luis and his family moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where they live today. The move was difficult for Luis. As a result of his limited English skills at the time he arrived in Phoenix, Luis felt leftout in school and found it difficult to make friends. Luis recalls his first educational experience in the U.S. as humiliating. He said, "They stuck me in this class where I had to listen to English tapes of 'see Dick run and see Jane walk.' It was a waste of time. They must have thought I was stupid or something just because my English wasn't that great. I had to fight my way out of those classes and into regular ones. It wasn't until I was in regular classes that teachers started to see that I was smart."

In the fall of 1993, Luis enrolled in the local university as an engineering major. In his sophomore year, he changed his major to bilingual education. Luis stated, "I chose bilingual education because it will allow me to speak both Spanish and English during my professional career." In addition to changing his major, Luis moved on campus sharing a dormroom with his close friend, Steve.

Data Collection

Following Erickson's (1986) criteria of validity, my goal was to gain a sufficient amount of time studying and/or interacting with the phenomenon under investigation, collect a variety of data, obtain enough psychological access to acquire an effective level of verstehen or empathetic understanding, and construct an account that seems authentic or has a feel of verisimilitude. Consequently, for more than two years, I listened to what Steve and Luis had to say about their university experience; observed their in- and out-of-class interactions with faculty members, fellow students, co-workers, and supervisors; and read about their struggles and triumphs in their

journals. Each method and source of data collection is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Observations. Observations, or what I call "shadowing," occurred approximately once a month (totaling 20) and involved observing the participants' day's activities throughout a six- to eight-hour period. On most occasions, I would meet the participants in their dorm room and "shadow" (observe) them as they went to class, met friends for lunch, and participated in student organizations meetings. Other places of observation included their dorm room, classrooms, study session areas, workplace, computing centers, and the student union.

Interviews. Twice a month audiotaped interviews (totaling 32) were also conducted in the dorm room the participants shared. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the meanings these students constructed of their first two years of college. An oral history (Martin, 1995) format was used for the interviews, focusing on the time periods that led up to the participants' arrival on campus through their second year of college. The students were interviewed individually and as a pair.

Document Acquisition. In addition to observations and interviews, individual journals were collected twice a semester. The students were encouraged to write about anything that concerned their experience at the university.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the data set consisting of interviews, observations, and journal entries was analyzed utilizing a concept modeling approach (Padilla, 1991). A concept model is a visual representation of the research findings. The concept modeling approach utilized for this research study involved two stages: analysis and synthesis.

Analysis. The first stage of analysis involved a process of examining the data set and breaking it down into parts. Fundamental in this stage was the identification of relevant assertions. Assertions, for this study, refer to statements made by research participants that are logically, grammatically, and semantically complete. For instance, "I came to this university because of my parents" is an example of an assertion in the field data. Padilla (1991) noted that assertions can be

either simple or complex. He stated that simple assertions make only one statement, while complex assertions "may include more than one semantic expression or logical relationship" (p. 265). The mechanics of data analysis involved giving a code to each relevant assertion. Coding began as an inductive process of low-level inference and involved preliminary searching through the data set for relevant assertions. This is similar to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) process of open coding.

A qualitative analysis computer software program, HyperQual2 (Padilla, 1992), was the primary tool used to code the assertions. HyperQual2 is a software program for entering, accessing, and linking data. This program also proved useful as I moved to the second stage of analysis: synthesis.

Synthesis. The synthesis stage involved two subsequent processes: discovering concepts and discovering relationships between concepts. Discovering concepts was a process of data reduction in which similar low-level inference codes, representing relevant assertions, were grouped together under a higher level of inference concept. At this point, existing codes were thought of as exemplars of discovered concepts. The process of discovering concepts was accomplished by utilizing the constant-comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). It should be noted that the concepts were inductively discovered and "grounded" in the sense that they were derived from coded data. In addition to discovering relevant concepts, this stage of synthesis also employed a testing of the validity of the concepts by: (a) seeking confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986), and (b) participant checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Once all relevant concepts were identified and tested for confirming and disconfirming evidence, an examination of the relationships between the concepts was completed. The constant comparative method was utilized for this process as well. Specifically, all grounded concepts were compared with each other in order to understand how they related to one another. The identification of the relationships between concepts resulted in the concept model. The concept model visually represents the relationships between the concepts and the social situation of the study.

Research Findings

A primary finding of this study was the forms of marginalization and alienation that these students experienced. Marginalization refers to experiencing repression or stigmatization or being placed in a position of marginal importance, influence, or power (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Alienation refers to experiencing estrangement in a particular environment or situation (Walsh, 1994). From the interviews and observations I conducted, I could hear and see how these students were marginalized and alienated by the various contradictions they experienced on campus. The origins of these contradictions were rooted in particular elements of the campus culture. I refer to these elements as three asymmetrical systems of representation. I have labeled these three systems of representation (a) the social world, (b) the physical world, and (c) the epistemological world.

The Social World

What I mean by the social world is a system of cultural representations which includes the racial and ethnic makeup of individuals and groups on campus, the power relationships that exist between and within these groups, and the language utilized between and within these groups. Within the social world, these students experienced marginalization and alienation due to a lack of Chicano representation among the students, staff, and faculty on campus; the lack of political power these groups possessed; and the lack of the Spanish language spoken on campus. For example, in a state where over 20 percent of the population is Chicano/Hispanic, the university in which these students must survive has a Chicano/Hispanic student population of less than nine percent, a Chicano/Hispanic faculty population of less than three percent, and a Chicano/Hispanic administrator population of less than two percent. Steve offered the following comment about surviving on a campus with so few Chicano students:

> I knew when I was accepted to the university that I was going to be around a lot of Whites. What I didn't realize was how that was going to make me feel. I mean, I almost feel invisible in my classes. It's like they don't know what to do with me or how to interact with me. I'm getting tired of it all, but I guess that's what I have to deal with if I am going to survive here.

The above comment exemplifies the marginalization and alienation that both students experienced within the social world of their campus environment. Even with the anticipation that the university environment would be dominated by an Anglo student population, the lack of Chicano students represented at the university had marginalizing and alienating effects.

For Luis, the lack of Chicano students on campus was particularly bothersome. Luis recounted a disturbing event that took place during his first week at the university:

> I went up there, you know, the student activities center, to find out if there were any Chicano student organizations on campus. No one wanted to help me. They just looked at me, like I was from another planet. Everyone there was White. There was not a brown person anywhere. I walked in, stood there for ten minutes or so, looking for someone to help me. They ignored me. So, I just left. I have never been back there since.

Luis' voice was full of anger as he shared this experience with me. When Luis finished, Steve offered a similar story with identical emotion. Being ignored was a common manifestation of the marginalization and alienation that both students experienced within the social world of their university environment.

In addition to the dearth of Chicanos in the university, the lack of political power Chicanos possessed also was troublesome. For instance, Steve described the following situation:

> You know, it seems like everytime Chicano students want to do something on campus, there's always someone telling us we can't do it. Even when we do get permission, our events are always stuck in small rooms. People can't even find our events because we are always stuck on the outskirts of campus or in a basement somewhere. White groups have their events in the best places.

What is disturbing about Steve's above comment is that he is not describing an isolated situation. On the contrary, Steve is describing a pattern of organizational behaviors, in this case decisions, that send a debilitating message -- namely, that Chicano student organizations do not have the same influence, power, or importance that White student organizations possess on campus.

Finally, interpersonal dynamics involving the use of language was problematic for both Steve and Luis. Luis shook his head in disappointment as he began recounting the following event:

> We were in line, waiting to order some food at Burger King. You know, the one in the student union. We were just kicking it, laughing, and telling jokes in Spanish. Then, this group of girls from a sorority kept turning around and looking at us. They were looking at us like we should stop talking in Spanish -- like we weren't suppose to be talking in Spanish. Where does it say that we can only speak English. I don't see any signs that say, "English Only." I can't stand it when that happens. Why should I feel bad about speaking Spanish?

Although there were no physical signs prohibiting the use of the Spanish language, both Steve and Luis received the message vis-à-vis social interactions that Spanish was a language not of the campus culture, but rather was something foreign and strange. The following section describes an additional element of the campus culture which proved troublesome for Steve and Luis, the physical world.

The Physical World

I labeled the second asymmetrical system of representation existing on campus the physical world. What I mean by the physical world is a system of cultural representations which includes such things as the physical spacing that exists on campus, the architecture of the campus buildings, campus sculptures, and other physical symbols found on campus such as posters and flyers. Within the physical world, marginalization and alienation were experienced due to a lack of Chicano representation in the architecture of the buildings, sculptures, banners, posters, and other physical symbols found on campus. For example, on a university campus composed of over 80 buildings, only two possess any sculptures or other artwork representing the Chicano culture. Luis described a salient experience concerning the lack of Chicano representation in the sculptures found on campus:

> One day, I was walking around campus with my younger brother who was visiting me. I was showing him around, pointing out to him the different buildings and sculptures we have on campus. I could see from his face how different this was for him. He looked uncomfortable, like he didn't belong here...and that pissed me off. It also reminded me how difficult it is for me to be here in such a different place. I actually became angry that I couldn't show him any sculptures of our culture. Why don't we have sculptures of our culture here on campus, I thought. We are as much a part of the history of this state as the Whites.

Here, unlike the social world, the marginalization and alienation Luis experienced were of a physical nature, in this instance, the lack of Chicanó sculptures existing on campus. The meaning Luis constructed from this lack of Chicano representation was that his culture was marginal in comparison to the Anglo culture represented at the university.

Steve had similar experiences within the physical world of his university environment. He described two uncomfortable situations in the following way:

> I can't tell you how many weird looks I get because of the clothes I wear or the car I drive. In most cases, other students, especially White students, look at me like I shouldn't be here...just because I'm not wearing the kind of clothes that they're wearing. And my car...I have a 1972 Impala. When the university police see me driving around, they treat me like I'm a gangster...always asking me if I'm a student here. Why should I have to drive a Geo Prizm or something to be treated like I belong here.

The above story is important as it highlights the powerful cultural meanings that are encoded in such physical symbols as clothes and cars. The alienating experiences articulated above involving such physical symbols as clothes and cars conveyed the powerful message that Steve's culture was not only marginal to the Anglo culture, but also that it did not belong at the university.

The Epistemological World

I named the final asymmetrical system of representation that exists on campus the epistemological world. What I mean by the epistemological world is a system of cultural representations which includes the knowledge that exists and is exchanged within various social spaces on campus. Within the epistemological world, these students experienced marginalization and alienation due to a lack of Chicano knowledge existing and being exchanged on campus. For example, at this university, less than three percent of the course offerings focus on the Chicano experience. Steve communicated his frustration concerning the lack of Chicano knowledge shared on campus:

> What I don't understand is why everything has to be from the White point of view. I don't mind reading about what Whites have done, but why can't we read more about what other people have done. I mean, I know Chicanos have done some incredible things. It just doesn't seem like we have much opportunity to learn about the history and achievements of our culture. And I'm frustrated with that. By leaving out the Chicano experience, they're telling us that Chicanos aren't important. And that's a bunch of crap!

Steve was straightforward in his interpretation of the lack of Chicano knowledge being shared on campus as he stated, "They're telling us that Chicanos aren't important." Such interpretations were often constructed not from what existed at the university, but rather from what was absent.

Luis, also, was frustrated with the lack of opportunities existing at the university to learn about the history and achievements of the Chicano culture. He commented:

> Sometimes I wonder if I should have taken some classes at the local community college. I heard there are more Chicano classes at the community college than here at the university. This place may be more prestigious, but I'm not learning what I want to learn. I'm not learning about me or where I came from. I'm learning about dead White guys, and I think that's why I get so bored in a lot of my classes.

For both students, the lack of Chicano knowledge existing or being shared on campus represented an additional form of marginalization and alienation. For Luis, the lack of Chicano courses being taught on campus was so problematic that he even considered going elsewhere to learn about the Chicano experience.

In summary, what the contents of each of these worlds indicate is that these students experience a campus culture of asymmetrical systems of representation (See figure 1.). It is within these systems that the dominant, Anglo, middle-class cultural representations not only function as key mechanisms toward the reproduction of the existing social order (Althusser, 1971), but also simultaneously marginalize and alienate the few Chicano representations and, therefore, Chicano individuals struggling for survival.

Insert Figure 1 About Here.

In addition to uncovering particular elements of the campus culture which hinder the persistence of Chicano students, I also discovered important sources of support for these students. Specifically, I found that (a) family, (b) friends, (c) role models, (d) language, and (e) existing cultural work served as critical sources of support. In fact, it was the understanding of this last category, existing cultural work, that helped me understand in what ways these sources of support were critical.

Sources of Cultural Nourishment

Throughout the study, one particular issue came up that I had a difficult time understanding: the role of music in these students' lives. On most occasions, when I would go to their dorm room for an interview, I could hear their music being played loudly even as I approached their building. I noted the other students in the dorm complaining about the loudness of their music. In an interview, I asked the students why they had the music playing so loudly and what they were going to do about all the complaints. The two of them looked at each other and said, "Nothing. We're going to keep playing this music as loud as we can for as long as we can." Then, one of the students began to tell me that it was his way of "relaxing and unwinding" and that

it was one of the few times during the day he could be himself, a Chicano. He told me, "They don't play my kind of music in the student union; they don't play my kind of music out on the student lawn, so when I finally get the chance to come home, not only am I going to play my music, but I'm going to play it loud." "I need it," he said. "It gives me energy."

At that moment, I realized that in addition to being a moment of protest against the lack of Chicano music found on campus, music, here, was serving as a source of energy for these students--a source of energy with the function of replenishing their cultural sense of selves. What made sense about the loudness of their music was that just as any human being held without food would tend to overeat once food was available, these two students felt the need to turn up the volume to a form of music which, during the day, was not available to them. In essence, these students were taking action in response to a form of cultural starvation.

Other sources of cultural nourishment that emerged from the data were their families, friends, role models, courses in Chicano studies, and physical symbols such as posters and pictures. In fact, I came to see how these sources of cultural nourishment could also be classified as existing in the same three worlds mentioned earlier: the social, the physical, and the epistemological. Within the social world, I could see how the students' families, friends, music, and language, in this case Spanish, were notable sources of cultural nourishment and support. Within the physical world, pictures, paintings, posters, and other artifacts found in their dorm room appeared to be sources of cultural nourishment. And within the epistemological world, there existed cultural nourishment in the form of knowledge constructed and shared from such sources as family members, Chicana/o literature, Chicana/o faculty, and courses in Chicana/o studies. The following sections offer examples of important sources of cultural nourishment.

Cultural Nourishment Within the Social World. Probably the most important source of cultural nourishment for these students was their families. Every Friday afternoon, Steve's parents would drive to the university to pick him up and take him home for the weekend. When I asked Steve if his parents required or expected that he go home every weekend, he stated:

> No, I want to go home. Sometimes I need to go home. It gets tough being out here, dealing with this kind of place all week. Sometimes I need to get away and be with my family. I feel new again when I return on Sunday night. It's hard to explain. I like being at the university, but it's not home. Two different worlds. Being with my family on the weekends helps me make it through the week.

For Steve as well as Luis, being with family was a moment of cultural revitalization. Family was the source of cultural nourishment to make such revitalization possible. Acquiring cultural nourishment from their families gave these students the energy they required to persist at the university.

In addition to family, fellow Chicano students also were important in Steve and Luis' efforts to persist at the university. Luis described the powerful experience of being around a large group of Chicano college students for the first time:

> When I went to my first MEChA meeting, I was blown away. I had never been in a room with so many Chicanos at the university before. I wondered where all of them had been during the day. It felt good to be in a room with so many Chicanos. I felt strong. In fact, I go every week now just because of the strength I get from being around my people. It's tough going to class and being the only Chicano. If it wasn't for MEChA, I don't know if I'd still be here.

Both students were active in MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) throughout the two years of the research study. They attended nearly every meeting and participated in the planning of many events. MEChA was vital to their persistence at the university, and, like their families, MEChA was an important source of cultural nourishment from which to draw strength.

Cultural Nourishment Within the Physical World. In addition to the social forms of cultural nourishment, Steve and Luis received cultural nourishment from various physical forms. During my first interview, as I walked into Steve and Luis' dorm room I paused for a moment. I was taken aback by the powerful cultural symbols that surrounded me. On Steve's side of the dorm room, the walls were covered with symbols such as the Mexican flag; a banner proclaiming

his birthplace, "East Los Angeles," and posters of famous Chicanos. Luis' side of the dorm room was covered with similar cultural symbols. I did not immediately inquire about the symbols on their walls, but they responded to my moment of pause by stating:

> This is the Chicano cultural center of the university! You see, you don't get to see these things on campus. These represent who we are, what we're about; what I am about. This is our little home away from home. Whenever we get tired of dealing with the White world out there, it's always cool to come to our little home away from home and charge up. This is one of the few places where we can really relax and be ourselves.

Although I had only conducted one interview, the experience was so striking, that I immediately began to understand the meaning of the cultural symbols that I observed on their dorm room walls. Steve and Luis used these symbols to construct a salient cultural space. This cultural space served as a source of cultural nourishment with the function of replenishing the cultural starvation that they experienced on campus.

Steve described another experience in which particular physical symbols served as important sources cultural nourishment. He stated:

> You know, I tripped out when I went to Dr. Garcia's office for the first time. I had never been to a Chicano professor's office before. I was shocked to see all of his Chicano and Mexican posters and pictures. He has this big picture of Zapata on his wall. It was cool. I felt energized when I left. I feel that way everytime I go to his office. He just has so many cool things, everywhere.

Besides their dormroom, both Steve and Luis stated that Dr. Garcia's office was one of the few places on campus where they truly felt comfortable. Both students described how they were drawn to Dr. Garcia's office. It was not a coincidence that when experiencing a difficult day, Steve and Luis would seek out Dr. Garcia, hoping to "hang-out" in his office.

Cultural Nourishment within the Epistemological World. In addition to the social and physical forms of cultural nourishment, Steve and Luis drew cultural nourishment from a variety

of epistemological forms. One of the most vital sources of cultural nourishment within the epistemological world were courses in Chicana/o studies. Luis described what courses in Chicana/o studies meant to him by stating:

> When I took my first Chicano studies class, I was excited and angry at the same time. I was excited about all the things I was learning, but I was angry because I had never been exposed to this stuff before. I mean, all this knowledge about our community is out there, and this is the first time that I'm hearing about it. I really got pissed off, like I had been ripped-off or something. I was starving for this kind of information. And, once I knew about looking at the world from a Chicano perspective, I did everything I could to learn more. I can't tell you how many books I read that were written by Chicano authors in that semester.

Both Luis and Steve were starving for Chicano knowledge. Courses in Chicana/o studies, although dismal, provided the kind of nourishment to ease such starvation. Moreover, these courses served as an impetus for discovering other epistemological forms of cultural nourishment. As a result of their courses in Chicana/o studies, both students began utilizing books written by Chicana/o authors as sources of cultural nourishment.

In addition to Chicano literature and courses in Chicana/o studies, Steve and Luis drew strength from the knowledge their parents possessed. For example, Steve recounted the following event:

> I had the most special experience the other day with my father. It was last weekend. I was at home on a Saturday night with nothing to do. I was kind of feeling stressed about going back to campus the next day. My dad took me outside, and we had a long talk. He said some really important things. And I thought to myself, "Wow, this man is a better teacher than half of my professors." He never went to college; didn't even graduate from high school, but the things he taught me that night have helped me to get this far.

Steve's comments above exemplifies how the knowledge of a parent can serve as a powerful source of cultural nourishment. Both Steve and Luis recognized and valued the knowledge their parents possessed. In many instances, it was the knowledge of their parents, shared in informal settings, that gave them the desire and sense of purpose to persist at the university.

Summary and Discussion

The goal for the study was to uncover the elements of campus culture which hindered or supported Chicano student persistence. The first set of findings described the elements of campus culture which hindered the persistence of Chicano students. These elements were identified as three, asymmetrical systems of representations. The three systems of representations were labeled, (a) the social world, (b) the physical world, and (c) the epistemological world. It is within each of these three worlds that the dominant White cultural representations communicate the message that a Chicano presence in a predominantly White university is something that is not important, or valued, or does not belong. Caroline Sotello Viernes-Turner (1996) makes a similar point as she describes the experience of students of color in a predominantly White university as "guests in someone else's house." (p. 356)

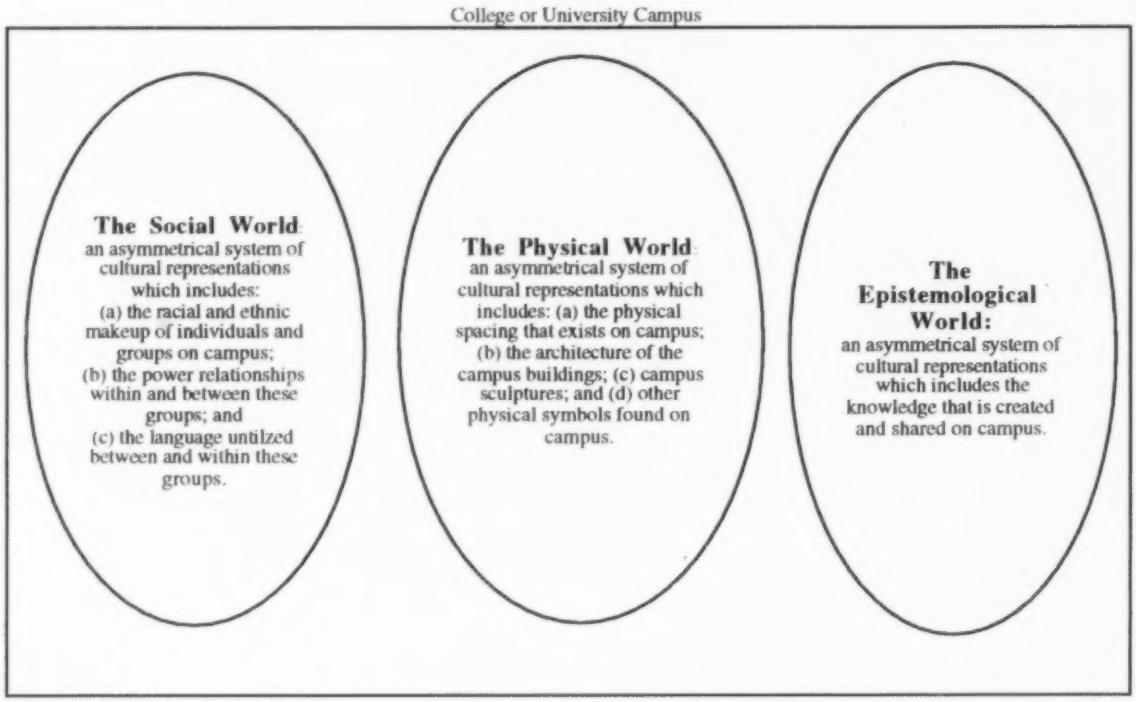
The lack of Chicano representations within the social, physical, epistemological worlds of the campus environment is also problematic in a different way. Given their "guest" status, Chicano students must work and survive in predominantly White colleges and universities deprived of the culture which has given them a sense of purpose and meaning for most of their lives. Consequently, without an adequate amount of Chicano culture represented on campus these students often experience cultural starvation. If cultural starvation can be viewed as important as physical starvation, these students, thus, are working on empty stomachs.

The second set of findings described the limited, but important, sources of support for Chicano students. These sources of support included Chicano student organizations, physical symbols representing the Chicano culture, courses in Chicana/o studies, Chicano faculty, Chicano literature, and most importantly, their families. Given their experience of cultural starvation in a predominantly White university, it should be no mystery, then, why Chicano students are so

drawn to other Chicano students, Chicano professors, or any other person or resource that represents the Chicano culture. Such actions cannot be solely explained as an act of self-segregation, but rather an act of cultural replenishment. It is important to note that many of the sources of cultural nourishment for Steve and Luis were either localized in small social spaces on campus, such as their dormroom and a Chicano faculty member's office, or existed off-campus in the homes of their parents.

The findings of this study have direct implications for campus administrators and student affairs practitioners. The findings of the study point to the very elements of the campus culture which can and need to be changed -- the social, physical, and epistemological worlds of the campus environment. Much of this change will involve transforming these worlds so that a more adequate representation of the Chicano culture exists. Transforming the social world of a college campus would involve increasing: (a) the number of Chicano students, staff, and faculty on campus; (b) the political power these groups possess; and (c) the use of the Spanish language on campus. Transforming the physical world of a college campus would involve increasing: (a) Chicano cultural representations within the architecture of the campus buildings; (b) the number of Chicano sculptures and other artwork; and (c) other physical images on campus that represent the Chicano culture. Finally, transforming the epistemological world of a college campus would involve increasing the amount of Chicano knowledge created and shared on campus. This could take the form of increasing the number of Chicana/o studies courses offered on campus, as well as transforming existing curricula so that they include a Chicano focus. Increasing Chicano representations within the social, physical, and epistemological worlds would not only transform important elements of the campus culture, but also would, simultaneously, increase the sources of cultural nourishment for Chicano students.

Figure 1. Elements of campus culture which hinder the persistence of Chicano students.


College or University Campus
The Social World:
an asymmetrical system of cultural representations which includes:
(a) the racial and ethnic makeup of individuals and groups on campus;
(b) the power relationships within and between these groups; and
(c) the language untilzed between and within these groups.
The Physical World:
an asymmetrical system of cultural representations which includes: (a) the physical spacing that exists on campus; (b) the architecture of the campus buildings; (c) campus sculptures; and (d) other physical symbols found on campus.
The Epistemological World:
an asymmetrical system of cultural representations which includes the knowledge that is created and shared on campus.

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